

WAKEFUL AND WATCHFUL EYES

NO. 2654

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 24, 1899

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, AUGUST 13, 1882

“Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”

Psalm 121:4

*“Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters,
and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress;
so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us.”*

Psalm 123:2

NOTICE, dear friends, that both these texts begin with the word, “Behold.” That word is meant to attract the readers’ attention. In some books, which are intended to be sensational, you are asked to behold, and when you look, there is nothing to see. But when God’s Word bids you behold what it has to say, you may be sure that the exclamation is not superfluous or misleading. It would be a marring of the Word of God to leave out even one of its smallest expressions and therefore, when we see this word “Behold” placed at the beginning of each of these texts, we may rest assured that there is in both of them something worth noting, worth examining and considering, and worth remembering and carrying away.

A very useful series of discourses might be preached upon the “Beholds” of the Old and New Testaments which culminate in John the Baptist’s, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,” and Pilate’s, “Behold the man.” And still more in our Lord’s own message to John, “Behold, I come quickly.”

But two Old Testament “Beholds” are to furnish us with a theme of meditation at this time. It is somewhat singular that they both relate to eyes. The first tells us about God’s eyes, “Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” His eyes are never closed. No feeling of weariness or need of slumber ever causes them to be heavy and to shut. And the second text tells us about our eyes, “Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us.”

See, brethren, both our texts speak about eyes, and they ask for the use of our eyes by saying, “Behold,” which is as though God said to us, “I am going to tell you about My eyes which never slumber. Therefore, look and see, for you shall find them ever open and ever watchful over you.”

Then the next text tells us about our eyes, and reminds us how God gives to His people clear and quick eyesight, so that they observe all the motions of their Master’s hand and are glad to note them and prompt to do as He directs. I have put these two texts together because I hoped that when you saw with joy how the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ear is open to their cry, you would then feel that it was a fit return that your eyes should be unto the Lord your God, and that your ears should be open to receive His teaching and to learn His commands. God grant that this may be the result of the sermon upon these two texts!

I. First, then, I am to speak to you concerning THE WAKEFUL EYES OF THE LORD OUR GOD.

We are told, in our first text, that the Lord, who keeps Israel, shall neither slumber nor sleep.

We learn from these words, first, *that the Lord keeps Israel*. Read the 121st Psalm through and you will find the word “preserve,” or “keep,” or “keeper,” repeated many times. God has Himself undertaken the work of keeping His people—it is His high office to preserve those who are His chosen ones.

“He that keepeth Israel.” By this expression we understand that the Lord keeps His people as a shepherd keeps his flock. There is a great depth of meaning in that word “keep,” as it is thus used, for a shepherd keeps the sheep by feeding them, by supplying all their needs, and also by guarding them from all their adversaries. He keeps the flock with vigilance so that it is not diminished either by the ravaging wolf or by the straying of the sheep.

Both by night and by day, even an ordinary shepherd takes great pains and the utmost care to preserve his sheep—while, “our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,” who was brought again from the dead, uses His omnipotence, His omniscience, and all His divine attributes in the keeping of His sheep. O beloved, if you are indeed His people and the sheep of His pasture, rest assured that He will preserve you! You are in good keeping, for He is the good Shepherd, and the great Shepherd, and the chief Shepherd, and He will perform all the duties of His office well and faithfully, that He may keep securely all whom His Father has committed unto Him.

Another figure may equally well illustrate the meaning of this expression. The Lord keeps His people, not only as a shepherd keeps his sheep, but as a king keeps his jewels. These are rare and precious things which are his peculiar treasure and he will not lose them if he can help it. He will go to war sooner than be deprived of them. He will put them in the most secure case that he has in his strong room, and set his most faithful servants to guard the place wherein they are stored. He will charge those who have the custody of his crown jewels to take a full and accurate account of them, and to be careful to examine them from time to time to see that they are all there, for he greatly prizes them and is not willing for one of them to be lost. They probably cost him a great price, or if not, they are part of his royal heritage and of the glory and honor of his kingdom, so he desires to keep them all.

Even so does the Lord Jesus keep His people, for they are His jewels. He delights in them—they are His honor and His glory. They cost Him a greater price than they can ever realize. He hides them away in the casket of His power and protects them with all His wisdom and strength. Concerning those who feared the Lord and thought upon His name, it is written, “They shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.” It is God’s work to keep His own jewels. He does not commit them even to the custody of the tall archangel who stands nearest to His throne, but the Lord Himself keeps them and none shall be able to pluck them out of His hands.

This is not all, for we might multiply figures to almost any extent and still not exhaust the meaning of the text. The Lord keeps His people as a governor keeps the city committed to his charge. He places his guards around the walls, he has his cannon on the battlements to defend the place against those who besiege it, and he is himself constantly on the watch. Early in the morning and late at night, he is on the walls—and through the night the watchmen keep their continual round, for the city must be preserved from scaling ladders and from assaults of every sort. The Lord will not let even the suburbs of the New Jerusalem be conquered by the foe. He will preserve the holy city, His own church, until the day when His Son shall come to reign in her forever.

I find that in all probability, the figure here used is an allusion to the common custom of having guards to watch the tents of travelers passing through the desert. At this very time, if you were journeying through the Holy Land you would find that when you came to your camping ground, and nightfall drew on, there would be certain persons employed to watch over the different tents, for otherwise, the wandering robbers of the desert would soon enter and take away your valuables or even your life.

I have noticed in the books of two or three travelers, this observation, “We found it exceedingly difficult to obtain a tent-keeper who could keep awake all night.” One gentleman speaks of discovering a thief in his tent and when he went outside to call the watchman, he found that the man had gone so soundly to sleep that he could only be awakened by one or two gentle kicks. When a man has been traveling with you all day, it is unreasonable to expect him to stay awake through the night to take care of you.

Therefore, see the beauty of the expression used by the psalmist, “Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” There shall be no deep sleep falling upon Him. Nay, there shall not even be a brief period of slumber, not even a wink of sleep shall ever overcome Him. A man may say, “I am so tired that I cannot keep my eyes open,” but God says not so.

Now turn to the second part of our first text, “Behold, he that keepeth Israel *shall neither slumber nor sleep*,” and think, first, of *God’s eyes as never wearying of His people*. I suppose that the fondest mother is sometimes glad when she can put her children to bed and have a little quiet time by herself. She at last grows weary even of their pretty ways and she is willing to let them go out of her sight for a while.

But the Lord never grows weary of His people. If some of you had such children as God has, you would never be able to endure their trying ways. None but the God of infinite patience could bear with such a family as He has. Any one of us might exhaust the patience of a hundred Jobs rolled into one—yet, tell it out and let even the angels hear it—we have not exhausted the patience of God. He has never been so wearied and worried by us as to say, “I must go to sleep, my children, and leave you to take care of yourselves.”

Our Savior’s eyes are never weary of looking on us—those eyes that closed upon the cross and then that opened again, on the resurrection morning, like bright stars, those eyes that, from the heights of heaven, have looked down upon the redeemed with ineffable delight of love, those eyes never grow weary of the chosen ones. Our Lord Jesus has such joy in His people as keeps Him from ever being weary of them. That is one meaning of His never slumbering or sleeping.

The next is, that *God is never forgetful of His people for a single moment*. You and I forget things which we most want to remember. Have you not, my sister, often shifted your ring from one finger to another and then had to say to yourself, “How came it here?” and then recollect the reason why you removed it? Yes, I know you have done so and we have had a hundred ingenious inventions to keep us in mind of something that we wished not to forget—yet we have forgotten it, after all.

The fondest human heart at times forgets, but that divine heart alone, never does. And those eyes which look down on us with infinite love flashing forth from them are never sealed in the slumber of forgetfulness. We forget all things in our sleep and lie completely indifferent to all that is happening around us, but God never does so—He never forgets us and He is never indifferent to us. Oh, what a blessed truth is this!

Sleep also throws us into a condition in which *we are incapable of helping ourselves*. But God is never in such a state as that. He is always awake to show Himself strong on the behalf of those who trust Him. You will never have to call to Him in vain, or get from Him the answer, “I cannot help you right now.” Elijah, in his irony, said that perhaps Baal was sleeping, or on a journey, and the idol god was quite unable to deliver those that called upon him. But our God, who made the heavens, is quick to hear the faintest cry of any of His people. He is perpetually girt with all might and energy—and if you do but appeal to Him, He will speedily fly to your relief. Yea, He will fly upon the wings of the wind, for He is prompt to deliver all those who put their case into His hands. God is never asleep in the sense that He is unable to help us.

And moreover, *God is never asleep in the sense that He ceases to consider us*. I do not know whether you can catch the thought so as to lay hold of it by faith, but we have an instance of it in the 40th Psalm where David says, “I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinketh upon me.” When? Now? Yes. Tomorrow? Yes. And yesterday? Yes. He was always thinking of us and He is always thinking of us.

The Infinite mind of God can think of all things at once. You and I, in thinking of one thing, often forget another, but it is not so with God. He is so great that His center is everywhere and His circumference is nowhere. And you, dear brother or sister, may be the very center of God’s thoughts and so may I—and all His redeemed may at the same moment have His thoughts fixed upon each one of them.

Can you realize the wondrous truth that there is never a moment, night or day, in which the great mind of the Eternal ceases to think of you? Then, how safe you are with God always looking upon you! How happy you ought to be with God always thinking of you! Yea, how joyful you ought to be because, even if others forget you, He never does!

You remember how Cowper represents Alexander Selkirk, when far away on that island of Juan Fernandez, saying,

*“My friends, do they now and then send
A wish or a thought after me?”*

He could not bear, in his loneliness, to be altogether forgotten by everybody. And none of us would like to be in that condition, but even if we were in such a plight, we could still find comfort in that ancient promise, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget.” It is rarely enough that mothers are so unnatural—still, “they may forget; yet,” says the LORD, “will I not forget thee.” Oh, drink that down! Is it not a sweet draught? Of all the luscious drinks that men ever delighted in, there can be none with such flavor as this choice wine of covenant faithfulness.

So much, then, for our first text, “Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” I have only given you a few brief hints. Lay them up in your memories and come with me to consider our second text, “Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us.”

II. The lesson of these words is that THE WATCHFUL EYES OF THE SAINTS ARE FIXED UPON THEIR GOD.

Which is the more wonderful text of the two? Certainly, it is a great marvel that God should always fix His eyes upon us, but I think it is a greater marvel that you and I should ever be brought to fix our eyes on God. For God to look at His people is according to His own nature, but for us to look upon God, is something superior to human nature—it is the gift of God and the work of sovereign grace.

I think that both looks are to be regarded as miracles of mercy. For a child of God to be so sanctified that He always fixes His eyes upon God, as a servant does upon his master’s hands—this is a very eminent degree of sanctification and is a thing worthy to be looked at, and worthy to have the word, “Behold,” put before it. I wonder whether you and I ever yet reached such a height of consecration to God as to be able to truly use the language of this text?

Alas! in many cases we cannot get men’s eyes fixed upon God at all. There is this natural world, with all its wondrous beauty. God has painted every flower and tinged the clouds with the glory of the setting sun. He is everywhere and yet men walk through His great house of nature and—fools that they are!—they say, “There is no God.”

It is hard to get men to see God. We put the Bible into their hands. They read it and are interested in its stories, but they see not God in it. Providence comes to their very doors with marvels, yet they say that they do not see God’s hand in anything that happens to them. And even when we preach—and this is the woe of woes!—we cannot get men to look to the Lord. God knows that I have never tried to speak that you would think of me for a single moment. I have sought to tell my tale as plainly as I could, and to force it home on man’s hearts and consciences as God might help me. And yet, at the end of the sermon, often the hearer’s only remark is, “How did you like *him*?”

It does not matter at all how you like *him*. Is that what we came here for—to fiddle to you, as men do in your orchestras, or speak before you as if we were mere actors playing for your amusement? It is of no concern to us what you think of our style or manner—it is the truth itself which we would fain drive home to you. It is that truth which, if we could, we would make you feel as the ox feels the sharp goad.

It is the blessed doctrine of Christ crucified which we would have you feed upon, as the hungry man devours the bread that is given to him and does not care whether he ever knows the baker’s name or not.

Still, I must say again that it is a hard thing to get men to see God anyhow and anywhere. They look around, above, beneath, everywhere—but to get them to fix their eyes upon God, “This is the work. This is the difficulty.”

The man of God who wrote this 123rd Psalm had been taught to look to God in a very remarkable manner, and I call your attention to it in the hope that many of you will do likewise. First, *his eyes were reverentially fixed upon the Lord*. He looked to God’s hand, wherever it was, with deep reverence—“as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters.”

He was, of course, talking about Oriental servants—the Hebrew word bears the meaning of slaves—and travelers tell us that when they go into the house of a wealthy person in the East, the master will give certain signs to his slaves and refreshments are brought in. But except when they are called, the servants stand at a distance, watching for the slightest motion of their master’s hands—they do not have the liberties that we happily accord to our servants—but they are nothing and nobody, mere tools for their master to use as he pleases.

And as to the maidens, I have heard that the women in the East have a harder time of it with their mistresses than the men do with their masters, and that the lady of the house is a more severe taskmaster than her husband is. So the maidens watch their mistresses very carefully, for they are sorely afraid of them, and they look with great care and fear to see what “Madam” would have them do.

Now, casting aside everything of human fear out of the figure, this is the way in which we ought to look to God. He is in heaven—we are upon earth. He is great—we are nothing. He is good—we are lumps of sin. It is for us, therefore, with the utmost reverence to seek to learn God’s will in every point, in His Word and in His works, and at once, without question, reverently to do what He commands us.

The next point is that the truly sanctified man looks to God’s hands *with obedience as well as with reverence*. Orientals, as a general rule, speak far less than we do, except when they sit around the fire at eventide and tell their tales. But an Eastern master seldom speaks.

A gentleman went, some time ago, into an Eastern house and as soon as ever he entered, the master waved his hand and the servants brought in sherbet. He waved his hand again, and they brought dried fruits. Then he moved his hands in a different way and they began to spread the table, and all the time, not a word was spoken, but they perfectly understood the motion of his hand. They had to look sharply to see how the master moved his hand, so that they might do what that motion meant. We have not very much of that dumb action amongst us, but on board a steamboat, you may see the captain moving his hands this way or that, and the call-boy is ready at once to pass the word down to those who are in charge of the engine.

That is just how the child of God should watch the hand of God in the Bible and in providence, so as to do at once whatever we plainly perceives to be his Lord’s will. Ah, me! I know some professing Christians who will not do God’s will till they have had a good whipping, or not until they have been chastened again and again. Remember that ancient injunction, “Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.” You know how the drivers have to pull at their reins. They say, “This creature is so hard in the mouth that we do not know how to manage him at all.”

And some of God’s people are terribly hard in the mouth—they need very rough handling to make them move. Yet we ought to be different from horses and mules. We ought to be ready at once, at a beck, or a wink, or a nod, to know what God would have us do, and do it reverently and obediently.

Then, also, *our eyes should be absolutely fixed upon our Lord*. The eyes of servants ought to be so directed to their masters that they not only see the sign, but obey it, whatever it means. It may be a very little thing, but yet the little thing should not be neglected. I would again say what I sometimes feel ashamed of having to say. I sometimes meet with a person who says, with regard to the matter of believers’ baptism, “Now, you know that baptism will not save me.”

You mean, miserable soul! Will you do nothing but what is necessary for your salvation? Is that the spirit that actuates you? Will you do only what is necessary to save your poor soul, which is hardly

worth saving if you talk like that? It is too small a thing to be worth anything, but unless baptism will save your soul, you will not attend to it?

“Well,” says another, “I have reversed the Scriptural order—I have put my baptism before my believing.” Who gave you leave to alter the Lord’s order? If servants were to act like that, what mischief we would have! Suppose they were to bring us in our dessert before they brought in our dinner—that would be a very small affair, yet it is important to observe the right order even in such matters. Or suppose we were to tell them to sweep the room and dust it—and they should dust the room and then sweep it? It is only altering the order, but you know what would happen. So is it with those who put baptism first and believing afterwards—it spoils the whole transaction and it violates the intention of God in the ordinance. You have no right to act like that.

I may remind you of a story which I think I told you some time ago. A poor youth earnestly wished to join the church, but his friends thought he was somewhat deficient in brain power and that he had better not be baptized. He lay sick and was evidently dying. And he said to his mother, “Mother, I wish I had been baptized and joined the church.” She replied, “My dear boy, you know that being baptized would not have saved you. You will go to heaven because you have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Oh, yes!” he said, “I know that. You do not think I am so stupid as to fancy that baptism would save me. I know that has nothing to do with going to heaven. But when I get there, I shall see my Savior and perhaps He will say to me, ‘Isaac, why did you not join the church?’ If I should say, ‘Lord, that was a very little thing,’ He would say, ‘Yes, then you might have done it to please Me.’” That story is just to the point—the smaller the matter is, the more careful we should be to attend to it, if it would please the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not be so clever, you servants who fancy that you know better than your Master, for perhaps He may find somebody else to be His servant if you behave like that.

Suppose that I was starting on a journey, early in the morning, and I said to my servant, “I should like a cup of coffee before I start,” and suppose that when I came down, she brought me a glass of cold water, I should ask her, “Why did you do that?” If she should reply, “Oh, sir, I thought that the water would be better for you than coffee!” I should say, “Well, I am very much obliged to you for thinking of me in that considerate way, but I shall have to engage another servant who does what she is told.”

So I advise you not to alter or judge God’s Word, but to obey it. Do not begin to calculate as to whether what you read there is right in your sight, or in the eyes of other people—the one question for you is—Has my Lord bidden me do this? If so, then, as the eyes of the maiden are to her mistress, so let your eyes be unto the Lord your God.

Once more, *our eyes are to be turned to the Lord solely*. The Eastern servant is not allowed to think. It is no business of his to have his eyes upon his master’s guests. They are to be fixed upon his master. And the maiden does not think it to be her business to watch the movements of the hand of the lady who calls to see her mistress—her eyes are to be on the hands of her mistress. She does not dare to take them off, for, perhaps, just when she is looking out of the window, or gazing in curiosity at some object, her mistress may be waving her hand and she may not see it. And then there will be a serious scolding and possibly something worse when the mistress gets her alone.

So you and I must not take our eyes off our God at any time—but His way and His will must be our sole law, and for this we must live, that we may please Him whose servants we are, for has He not bought us with His precious blood? So we are not our own, we are “bought with a price.”

“Ah!” says one, “we have not come to that yet.” No, I fear you have not, but you ought to. There is no peace for us till we do. He who, either by omission or commission, neglects to do or goes beyond His Lord’s command will find sorrow in his soul. Depend upon it, the roots of our most bitter griefs strike into our sins and if our sins were overcome, the major part of our sorrows would be removed. Oh that God would give us grace to be very tender in conscience, to tremble before Him, as well as to rejoice before Him, for in very deed the man who does not tremble at His Word has not yet learned to truly love Him!

Now I must speak to some here who, perhaps, know nothing about what I have been saying, for they have lived without God. I will finish my sermon by just reminding you that this may do very well for this world—though it is a poor business at the best—but when you come to die, you will need God. Now, when I die and go to be with God, I know that Christ will not say to me, “I never knew you.” I am sure He cannot, because He has long known me. I was about to say that He has known me to His cost, for I have long been a beggar at His door every day, and I cannot live without Him. I am naked, and poor, and miserable apart from Him.

I have always some errand or other to make me go to Him—some sin to confess, or some want to be supplied. So He knows me well enough. You are sure to know a beggar who is always at your door. Perhaps he says that he has not been there before, but you reply, “Why you have been here every morning for the last six weeks. I have always seen you begging here the first thing in the morning.” You cannot say that you do not know him, yet that is what will happen to those of you who have never sought the Lord Jesus Christ and never prayed to Him. Christ will say to you, “I never knew you.”

I feel that the spot I occupy just now is a very solemn one, for, like the captain of a ship, I can see all over this place. Often, when I come here on a Sunday, somebody says, “So-and-so has gone.” There is one gone out of that seat which you occupy, my friend. He was there last Sabbath-day, but he has gone. And I can point to many of you and say, “You are sitting in the seat where one used to sit whose face was vary familiar to me, but he has gone home.” And some go to my great surprise. I have thought to see them again many times, and when I have missed them, I have said, “Oh, she has gone to the seaside for a little holiday.” But someone has said to me, “No, she is dead. She was suddenly taken away.” Or, “He was called away only this last week.”

Ah! me. Ah, me! And what faces I may be looking into now that I shall never see again! Give me your hand my friend, for this is the last time I may ever speak to you. I beg you to get ready to go on that last long journey. Oh, do not die unsaved! I beseech you, do not attempt to enter the eternal world, with all its dread, without a Savior.

This is the way of salvation. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust yourself with Him. Put your soul, as a sacred deposit, into the hand of that dear Banker whose bank has never failed—nay, more—who has never lost a penny that was entrusted to Him. And ere you sleep, just rest in Jesus. God help you to do so, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—194, 119 (SONG VI), 123, 538

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JEREMIAH 30:1-22

Verses 1-2. *The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book.*

We believe in verbal inspiration and though some people treat with contempt the very idea of words being inspired, be you sure of this, if you have not inspired words, you are not likely to get inspired men. Besides, words are to the thought what the shell is to the egg, and if you break the shell, you have destroyed the egg. Somehow or other, the thought will ooze out unless it is conveyed in God’s own words. Observe that the Lord does not say to Jeremiah, “Write thee all the *thought* that I have given thee,” but “Write thee all the *words* that I have spoken unto thee in a book.”

3. *For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.*

And so they did, and so they shall in a yet fuller sense, for this is a promise that has fulfillments and fulfillments. Man’s promises, once kept, are ended, but God’s promises are perpetual—they are

springing wells which never run dry. That which He fulfilled once, He often takes the opportunity to fulfill again on a yet larger scale, as He will doubtless do to His ancient people in the latter days.

You who are in spiritual captivity tonight may derive comfort from these words, “I will bring again the captivity of my people.” It is the way of God to deliver the captives. What He does once is only an index of what He is in the habit of doing. It is God’s delight to devise means by which He will bring back His banished ones. So, in due time, He will end your captivity and you shall enjoy the blessed liberty which is the portion of His people.

4-5. *And these are the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace.*

God hears His people’s voices when they cry. He knows the tone and accent which they use, and sometimes, when He is listening to them, He hears “a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace.” Possibly that may be the condition of some who are here tonight. If so, may the Lord, who hears their cry, bring them out of their tremblings, and fears, and fill their mouth with laughter and their tongue with singing!

6-7. *Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.*

This passage evidently alludes to a time of very great distress, when men’s hearts were swollen within them as if they would burst for very grief. Not simply here and there one, but the great mass of the people seemed to be in sore trouble. Even the stout-hearted ones began to feel inward pangs of affliction, yet it was then that the Lord said, “It is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.”

8. *For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him:*

Here is a word for you tried ones. God, who sometimes permits His child to wear the yoke of the oppressor, will take that yoke away. He will snap the bands that are around your neck and enable you to rise into the glorious liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free. O bondaged ones, be of good comfort, and look for speedy deliverance through the power of the great Emancipator!

9-10. *But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them. Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid.*

There are great things in reserve for God’s ancient people Israel, but there are not less laid up for God’s spiritual Israel, for by them shall the greatest fulfillment of the promise be realized. They shall indeed be quiet and none shall make them afraid. Note that these are the very men who had their hands upon their loins and whose faces were pale with fright. These are they who were ready to die of heartbreak. Yet even they shall, by the rich grace of God, be in rest and quiet, and none shall make them afraid.

I wish that we could all realize the fulfillment of that promise even now and that our gracious God would dwell with us as He is wont to abide with those who bear His name, and thus give us that blessed quiet and rest which we so much need.

11. *For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.*

Look abroad and see what God has done to Israel. This is peculiarly the time of Israel’s trouble and the Jewish people were, perhaps, never worse persecuted than they now are in certain parts of the world. Yet the Lord will not allow any nation to crush them and He will Himself avenge all wrongs that they suffer. He still says to them, “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye.” And it is very noteworthy that whenever God has used any nation as a rod to chasten the Jews—and He has used many

in that way—He has always broken that kingdom up when He is done with it. Think of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Look at Spain and see how mean and despicable that nation has become because of its cruelty to the people of God.

Now, if this be true of Israel after the flesh, depend upon it that it is also true concerning God's spiritual people. Though He will correct us when we deserve chastening, it will always be in measure and He will not make a full end of us. God has measureless wrath against the ungodly for their measureless sin, but as for His own people, He has cast their sin behind His back and only as a wise and faithful Father does He chasten them for their profit.

12-14. *For thus saith the LORD, Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous. There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up: thou hast no healing medicines. All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased.*

God never gave His people leave to sin—and sin in them is worse than sin in any other people, for they sin against more light, and more love, and therefore it grieves the Lord the more and He smites all the more heavily, and mark you, when God smites, there is nobody who can comfort us.

A quaint old writer, whose book I was reading the other day, commenting on that part of the parable where the friend, disturbed at midnight, said, "My children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee," wrote something like this, "When God is in bed, there are none of His children up to help us. If He does not open the door, there are none of His saints to give us a crust—all must come from Him." Therefore we must cry unto Him and say, "Awake for my help, O God; for all my lovers have forgotten me; they seek me not in the time of my distress." When God wounds us, men often desert us—and those that seemed to be most fond of us forsake us when God smites us.

15-16. *Why criest thou for thine affliction? thy sorrow is incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity: because thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee. Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured;*

How striking is this sentence and what a surprise it gives us as we read it! We might have thought, after the Lord had spoken as He did, that He would have given His people up to their enemies, but instead of doing so, He says, "Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured;"

16-17. *And all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil, and all that prey upon thee will I give for a prey. For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.*

Did you notice that word, "therefore," in the sixteenth verse? Can you see any "therefore" in it—any logical conclusion that could be drawn from the prophet's premises? The argument seems to be, "Because your disease is incurable, therefore will I restore health unto you. Because no one else can heal your wounds, therefore I will heal them." It is a blessed thing to feel that you are incurable, for then it is that God will cure you. When there is an end of you, then you shall begin with God. But as long as you are full of self or sin, that passage shall be fulfilled to you, "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away."

18-19. *Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwellingplaces; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof. And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small.*

Well might the Lord introduce such a promise as this with the word, "Behold".

Again I remind you that these are the people who had their hands on their loins. These are they who were in sore trouble of soul, yet now they are merry and full of gladness. And we also have learned to sing,

*My mourning He to dancing turns,
For sackcloth, joy He gives,
A moment, Lord, Thine anger burns,
But long Thy favor lives.*

20-21. *Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all that oppress them. And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the LORD.*

There is One, whom we call Master and Lord, who approaches the throne of God on our behalf—One who fulfils that ancient Word of God, “I have exalted One chosen out of the people.” Our glorious Savior, through His humanity, is one of ourselves, and He appears before God on our behalf, blessed be His holy name!

22. *And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.*

Happy are we if we can rejoice in this precious truth.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.